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ABSTRACT

An effort to go further than recent attempts have gone in relating the content of materials for teaching English as a second language (ESL) to learner needs is illustreated in two separate types of projects which integrate ESL and academic course content. One places advanced ESL students with American students in an intercultural communication course using discussion, exercises, and reading. This type, previously implemented and developed at Portland State University, has proven to be both culturally and academically beneficial to both student groups, has highlighted the possibilities of interdepartmental cooperation, and has led to development of a whole intercultural communication program in the speech department. The second type of academic-ESL integration enrolled advanced ESL students in both a subject-area class and an ESL class into which the instructor incorporated the subject-class text. This approach was used first in an anthropology course, with limited success, and in a sociology course. It is suggested from these experiences that: (1) ESL orientation go beyond linguistic and cultural preparation to academically related matters such as library use and registration procedures; (2) academic themes and concepts be incorporated into ESL programs at every opportunity; (3) coordination with non-ESL faculty be undertaken; and (4) analysis of student notes and lectures be used to gain insights into listening and reading comprehension. (MSE)

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Abstract

Integrating ESL and Academic Studies

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In designing ESL materials recent emphasis has been placed on relating content to the needs of the learners and the subjects they are planning to study. While this has led to a proliferation of 'functional' textbooks, ESL students still feel a wide gap between their ESL classes and academic courses even after completing an intensive program or obtaining a required TOEFL score. This paper reports on an attempt to integrate ESL and academic courses. To accommodate the needs of the learners two types of integration are considered. In the first, advanced ESL students are placed with American students in an Intercultural Communication course. This type, which has been implemented and developed, has proved to be highly beneficial both culturally and academically. Awareness of differences and difficulties based on faculty and student feedback has provided insights into effective interaction. In the second type of integration an attempt is made to relate ESL reading, writing and listening comprehension to the content of an academic course in which advanced ESL students are enrolled. The coordination strategies and the suggested directions are discussed.

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Integrating ESL and Academic Studies:

Textbooks designed for advanced ESL college students have recently tended to relate the content to college courses such as anthropology and the sciences. Special courses are now set up to teach English for academic purposes utilizing these 'functional' textbooks with the idea that once the students have completed these courses, they should be ready for their academic programs. The growing interest in preparing the international students for their studies is reflected in the increase in the listed programs from 57 to 510 over a period of ten years as reported by the International Institute of Education Directory 1984 . While the interest is increasing and the efforts are expanding to facilitate the transition from ESL to academic programs, the gap is still wide between the two as revealed in some recent studies and surveys (Perkins and Pharis 1980, Oslter 1980, Greis 1983).

This paper discusses the efforts to bridge the gap and proposes two forms of integration. The first form, which has been developed over several years, is shown as an example of fruitful coordination between ESL and non-ESL faculty. The stages to achieve the second form of integration are described together with the problems encountered. Some future directions are suggested following a discussion of current practices and trends.

Current Practices and Trends:

At present there is a dichotomy between language proficiency and academic competence. Foreign students are expected to achieve language proficiency either by satisfactorily completing an ESL program or, more often, by providing a required TOEFL score before enrolling in an academic program.

The TOEFL Manual (1983:15) clearly states the distinction between the two areas based on the assumption that once the non-native English speakers have achieved language proficiency they will somehow automatically make a smooth transition to their academic courses. What actually happens, however, is that non-native speakers, after completing their ESL program, often tend to delay taking courses involving extensive reading and writing, taking instead courses such as mathematics, computer sciences and foreign languages. While enrolled in ESL, many students do not see the relevance of ESL except as a required program before 'passing the TOEFL.' As a result, their motivation is conditioned by the amount of TOEFL practice provided.

The awareness of the problem, however, has led to efforts to bridge the gap between the linguistic and the academic in several ways, especially in textbooks and videotpaes, to relate the content to the learners' needs and their future coursework. Thus the reading selections now incorporate interesting material from anthropology, literature, science and technology. Samples of lectures are put on videotapes for developing listening comprehension.

Although these efforts represent a step in the right direction in enhancing orientation, they cannot be considered adequate for providing a smooth transition. The recent trend is toward integration which places emphasis on language use rather than mastery of language as a system. (Wilkins 1976:16) According to Widdowson, "we should think of an area (or areas) of use right from the baginning and base our selection, grading and presentation on that." (1978:15)

Similarly, Krashen and Terrel feel that "the goal is to involve students so deeply in the message that they actually "forget" it is encoded in another language." (1983:134)

The linguistic content, though important, is not the only factor in academic success. Cultural expectations largely determine role behaviors in the classroom. According to one study (Nadal 1980), only 19 out of 45 roles were found to be the same for both American and international students. Thus the perception of certain roles, e.g., not taking a test when not ready, was significantly different for professors and international students. The differences are compounded by the fact that ESL students are separated from American students.

To achieve a smooth transition, a gradual process of integration is essential. Integration, as discussed here, involves linguistic content, cultural expectations and academic skills in the natural context of college experience. Although separating ESL students at the lower levels helps reduce anxiety and provide necessary orientation, it is important that as they advance, they be gradually guided to be with American students in regular academic courses. If abruptly put with American students, they often become frustrated and end up as a burden to the instructor who does not have the time or the knowledge to handle their problems. At our University the problem was so serious that the institution set up an Intercultural Communication workshop for the faculty. On the other hand, with gradual integration and proper coordination, the presence of international students in the classroom can be an enriching and rewarding experience to both instructors and students.

Orientation vs. Integration:

In orientation, foreign students are usually separated from native English speakers except for limited contact often for tutoring or conversation practice. It is conducted in linguistic and cultural forms prior to arrival, or throughout the period of language study. Thus, the term orientation is generally applied to many language programs in this country. Integration, on the other hand, involves cultural, linguistic and academic experience while participating in courses that combine both native and non-native students. In spite of the distinction between the two terms, it is important to keep in mind that they represent two closely related stages in the process of successful college study.

Two Types of Integration:

Following orientation, two types of integration are recommended in light of our experience at Portland State University. The first type which is in Intercultural Communication has proved to be a highly successful course. The other type is still experimental as will be explained later.

To understand the process of integration, some background information on the nature of the ESL program is necessary. ESL at PSU is for credit and ESL students may enroll in some non-ESL courses at the intermediate level, but more often, at the advanced level. For a number of years, as in many other programs, there have been several attempts to help ESL students achieve a smooth transition to academic studies. One such attempt was setting up specialized courses in which students were provided with relevant materials to develop skills in a specific area such as engineering or business.

These efforts, however, could not achieve the desirable integration. Students were still unable to function effectively outside of ESL. One institutional survey revealed the dissatisfaction of the faculty with the performance of many non-native speakers.

The First Form of Integration:

One important step toward integration is to secure the cooperation of the Institution's faculty members and get them involved in the design of new ideas or even new courses. It is only through such involvement that integration can be effectively achieved. Our experience bears testimony to this point. Some 15 years ago, a speech instructor was asked to teach speech to intermediate ESL students. It was suggested that putting some ESL students together with American students in a speech class could be beneficial to both. The course,which was designed to accommodate both, proved to be highly successful; in fact it has led to the development of a whole program in Intercultural Communication in the Speech department. According to the course description "small groups of international and American students explore concepts and issues of Intercultural Communication through discussion, exercises and reading - Groups are led by intercultural facilitators." The course, in addition to its academic value, has been of special cultural assistance in having newly arrived international students. In fact it has been so favorably viewed by students and faculty that it is generally recommended for all new international students.

The Second Form of Integration:

The success of the Intercultural Communication class has suggested a new direction that can be followed with appropriate modification in integrating

ESL and other University courses. It is at the advanced level (TOEFL 500+) that such integration is best achieved. As a first step, the selection of the appropriate course must be determined on the basis of priorities, available sources and practical considerations.

1. It should be a course with no prerequisite that may count toward graduation.
2. It should be challenging and with interesting content that involves the use of reading and, if possible, writing skills. Thus mathematics is excluded.
3. The instructor should be interested and willing to cooperate in providing feedback and allowing the class to be videotaped.

During the Fall of 1983, the idea of integration started with one course, Anthropology 101A, which seemed to satisfy most of the guidelines considered. It should be pointed out that not all instructors approached showed interest in having ESL students in their classes because they felt these students would need more help than they could provide.

Course Description: "Anthropology 101A is designed to familiarize students with the data and issues relevant to human evolution. We start with the premise that humans are animals and use the course to explore the evidence that supports our unique position within the animal kingdom. Along the way we will investigate issues relating to evolution - its tempo and mode - genetics, and the emergence of human culture."

The plan was for the ESL reading and writing instructors to incorporate the Anthropology textbooks in their classroom assignments. Furthermore, the writing instructor volunteered to attend some of the classes.

Some of the classes were videotaped to be used in the listening comprehension class. The Anthropology instructor, while providing what might be considered normal university lectures, was careful not to give the ESL students any special treatment. The plan, however, ran into some difficulties. Not all of the students enrolled in the course as expected and some dropped the course at mid-term for fear of not getting a passing grade. Another problem was that the tests were multiple choice so that no significant writing was involved.

Sociology 204:

In the Winter term, it was decided to try another course in light of the Fall term experience. This time the ESL reading class was expanded to deal with the textbook and the listening comprehension class was to help with note-taking strategies.

Course Description: (Soc 204) "The basic findings of sociology concerning the individual, culture, group life, social institutions, and factors of social change. Consideration of fundamental concepts and research methodology."

Reading: The course required rather extensive reading, and although there were no prerequisites, the reading was certainly more than what is involved in ESL at the advanced level. As Perkins and Pharis point out (1980:146) "...it seems that our advanced ESL students...are well below average college freshmen in reading ability." How, then, do these international students manage to pass college courses? The writers offer two explanations: practice in taking courses and "the deep cognitive machinery" that is equal to that of their "English-speaking competitors." This, however, does not mean the gap is easily or adequately bridged.

Background information, as the schema theory indicates, is lacking and hence there is the difficulty with such concepts as 'evolution' in anthropology and 'alienation' in sociology.

Note Taking:

In addition to the reading, the note-taking skills have been found to be crucial. One rather interesting attempt was made by the ESL instructor to take notes in the sociology class and then compare hers with those of the students. The analysis has helped provide suggestions for developing effective strategies. The students' notes reveal a parallel between reading and listening strategies in that the tendency to read all the words is similar to the tendency to take down all the words given by the lecturer.. If, instead, the students look for the organization and anticipate the main points, both reading and listening skills can be significantly improved.

Suggested Directions:

The process of integration obviously involves more than the mastery of language skills and even those skills can only be effectively achieved when functionally related to adacemic studies. If gradually implemented, integration can enhance the students' motivation and at the same time bridge the gap between ESL and academic studies. It may help change the unfavorable attitude toward ESL as a means of "passing the TOEFL." One encouraging note was that members of the faculty and the administration outside of ESL expressed their appreciation for the idea of integration.

To ensure successful implementation, the following suggestions are offered:

1. As a first stage, orientation should go beyond the linguistic and the cultural preparing the students for the academic environment from the start.

For example, students should be exposed to the library system and the registration procedure in their ESL training.

2. In the structure of the program, every attempt should be made to incorporate academic themes and concepts. Thus the conversation classes, while providing practice in necessary social interaction, must also emphasize functions, role behaviors and content relevant to the college setting.

3. A form of Intercultural Communication can be the initial stage in integration at the intermediate or advanced level. The students find it culturally helpful and academically relevant.

4. At the advanced level, ESL students may be allowed to audit or take for credit a course or courses selected on the basis of future relevance.

5. The design of ESL should emphasize the content areas: humanities, social science, and the sciences. Eventually, the students take a reduced load of courses, supported by ESL reading, writing and listening comprehension and study skills.

6. Coordination with non-ESL faculty is important to facilitate understanding and interaction. Perhaps such coordination may lead to the introduction of new courses that are enriching to both American and international students.

7. Analysis of the lectures and the notes taken by the student should provide insights into strategies for listening comprehension and reading skills.

To sum up, the transition from ESL to academic courses can be rendered smooth through the stages of orientation leading to integration of linguistic, cultural and academic skills. Rather than have the students first complete ESL and then take academic courses, they should be guided by ESL in the process of taking selected courses at the advanced level such as Intercultural Communication and Sociology. Although the required coordination involves time and effort especially on the part of the ESL faculty, the integration process can be motivating and rewarding.

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